



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## Pentecost Sunday | Year A B C



Andrej Rublev. Angels at Mamre: Trinity



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

*God of mercy,*

*You wash away our sins in water,*

*You give us new birth in the Spirit,*

*And redeem us in the blood of Christ.*

*As we celebrate Christ's resurrection*

*Increase our awareness of these blessings,*

*And renew your gift of life within us.*

*We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,*

*Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,*

*One God forever and ever.*

*[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, ICEL, Catholic Book, New York, 452]*

## Liturgical Context

- ▶ The early Church considered the Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost to be one great feast that celebrated the Paschal Mystery.
- ▶ Pentecost brings the Easter season to an end.
- ▶ Pentecost is often referred to as the birthday of the Church even though in truth the Church was born on Calvary when blood and water flowed from the side of Christ—water for baptism that generates the Church and Eucharist that sustains it.
- ▶ The Church sought to restore Pentecost to its close association with the resurrection, and ascension, to its place within the Easter mystery and the Paschal mystery.
- ▶ The *General Norms for the Liturgical Calendar* states: “The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one “great Sunday” [#22].
- ▶ Thus, while we do focus attention on the sending of the Spirit, Pentecost is still an Easter feast that celebrates the paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. (For a more thorough overview of Pentecost see *Word and Worship Workbook, Year A*, “Pentecost Sunday”.)
- ▶ The early Church celebrated baptisms on the feast of Pentecost. Thus the feast has always had an inherent missionary focus.
- ▶ The sacrament of Penance has its roots in today’s Gospel.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today’s liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today’s Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2, 1-11

- ▶ Today begins the Christian mission—the Christian kerygma that goes forth to the world empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ The Spirit appears in this version of events at Pentecost. The Spirit comes on Easter Sunday in the Gospel. It is the coming we celebrate—not WHEN the Spirit came.
- ▶ The Pentecost event reflects the church as a larger gathering than just the Twelve.
- ▶ The story is recast in true dramatic flair with echoes of Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai.
- ▶ The new Twelve gather evoking the twelve tribes of Israel. A sound is heard within the house that filled the entire house much like the sound that was heard on Mt. Sinai that shook the entire mountain. The tongues of fire echoed the fire of burning bush fame--both illustrating God’s manifestation. Where fire occurs in Scripture God is present.
- ▶ The tongues of fire represent the prophetic ministry of the word that will go forth, empowered by the risen presence of Christ—his Holy Spirit.
- ▶ The Spirit will usher in a new evangelization—a new power to proclaim the

Christian kerygma.

- ▶ Pentecost is an expression of realized eschatology—the kingdom of God now and yet to come—it is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Israel. It is a sign of the last age—the final gathering of God’s people.
- ▶ The feast is first for Jews then for the entire world.
- ▶ Pentecost is the antidote to Babel. The people of Babel were scattered in confusion by their sin and arrogance. Pentecost is a gathering of the people who now understand and are able to communicate each in his or her own language through the power of the Spirit.



## Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Why is the wisdom literature still relevant for our contemporary culture?
- ▶ What is wisdom and why do we need it?
- ▶ Where in your life is Lady Wisdom needed? What can she offer you at this time in your life?
- ▶ Who is the wisest person you know and why did you choose that person as an example of wisdom?
- ▶ In what way does this reading from Proverbs reveal the Trinity?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

### Second Reading: Romans 8:8-17

- ▶ Paul’s letter to the Romans is considered Paul’s finest theological work.
- ▶ His message is radical and revolutionary. God forgives and forgets our sins. They are not held against the sinner.
- ▶ God treats the penitent like a wayward child. He loves the sinner unconditionally and always welcomes him or her home.
- ▶ The child/sinner is restored to the status of “beloved.” It is as though he or she never left the fold in the first place.
- ▶ The Law does not provide the reconciliation and mercy that only Jesus can give.
- ▶ When a person relies on the Law he or she seeks to work out his or her own salvation. The Law cannot save. Only God can save.
- ▶ Christ won our salvation through the sacrifice of the cross.
- ▶ Thus we can do no less than live a righteous life in response to so great a gift.
- ▶ God’s redemption was freely won and freely offered to all who ask.
- ▶ Before the sacrifice of Christ, the Law was needed as a guidepost.
- ▶ Now that Christ won salvation for everyone, the Law is no longer needed as the means of salvation.

- ▶ Paul insists that we are to look within ourselves and see what God sees—a person, loved, forgiven and redeemed.
  - ▶ The Law is necessary in so far as it is a reminder of the ethical imperatives of Gospel living.
  - ▶ The Law simply serves as a reminder of how we are to live and act in the world.
  - ▶ Jesus did not come into the world to create a new set of commandments. He came to save us and to love us into healing and freedom.
  - ▶ Jesus came to show us how to live.
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- ▶ Christians are to emulate Christ and pattern their lives after him. They can only live a Christ-centered life through the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - ▶ Even though human beings are born into the sinful human condition, we are nevertheless created in the Imago Dei—the image of God. God sees the God-given intrinsic goodness in the human heart even when we sin.
  - ▶ We are imbued with Jesus' own divine nature—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
  - ▶ We are challenged to cooperate with the Spirit who lives within us and who leads, guides and directs our lives.
  - ▶ The Spirit constantly calls us to return to God's loving embrace and to understand that we are God's children.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Are you inclined to think that following the Law is going to insure your salvation?
- ▶ What are some of the characteristics of people who believe that the Law will save them? How do such people behave as a rule? Why is Paul so insistent that the Law does not save? What is the danger in thinking that it does?
- ▶ We are created in the image of God and God sees an intrinsic goodness within us. If God asked you to describe what is good about you, how would you respond?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Holy Spirit lives within you?

## Gospel: John 14:15-16, 23b-26

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

## Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.



- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
  - ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
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- ▶ The subtext of this Gospel is Jesus' absence. The fact that he will be leaving his disciples is the underlying context for this section of John's Gospel.
  - ▶ Jesus presents the most important commandment of all commandments—the Law of Love.
  - ▶ He insists that love of God, self and neighbor is the driving force of faithful discipleship.
  - ▶ The fog of misunderstanding is starting to lift and the disciples are becoming more aware of the gravity of unfolding events.
  - ▶ Jesus reminds them that they are to draw on the faith they have been given—it will be their strength in the days ahead.
  - ▶ John's community is well aware that Jesus sent the Paraclete—his own Spirit—to advocate for them and to be their strength and presence in the midst of his absence.
  - ▶ The Spirit would strengthen them no matter what trial, tribulation or suffering they might endure in the coming days.
  - ▶ Jesus will always be with them through the power and presence of his Holy Spirit.
  - ▶ Rather than preparing a place—somewhere out there—in another place—the place Jesus is preparing resides within--within the human heart.
  - ▶ The Spirit of God will dwell in the hearts of all believers.
  - ▶ Believers will encounter the Presence and Power of the indwelling Spirit of God.
  - ▶ Jesus' absence will not be felt as the Spirit will take his place.
  - ▶ Believers will experience the love that Jesus has for the Spirit, the love Jesus and the Spirit have for the Father and the love the Father has for all three persons—love that pours out in the hearts of all who call on him in faith.
  - ▶ The disciples wonder why Jesus does not reveal himself to the world. He answers them by telling them that he will be revealed in the hearts of those who love.
  - ▶ Love is the operative word—love recognizes love.
  - ▶ John believes that the coming of Christ resides in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women.
  - ▶ John's community believes that the Spirit was the driving force in the community of believers.
  - ▶ The Spirit helps the community grow in wisdom and discern the will of God.
  - ▶ The Holy Spirit is the Christ who appeared after his resurrection from the dead.
  - ▶ Disciples are not to fear. Jesus is alive and well in the community through faith in the presence of the Spirit in the life of the community.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way do we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community today?
- ▶ What evidence is there that the Spirit is working in the lives of the people in your parish?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Spirit of God is alive and working in your life?
- ▶ What is Jesus' message of love in the Gospel?
- ▶ In what way are you presently living Jesus' message of love in your home, work and play? In what way does love need to grow in your life?
- ▶ If someone were to tell you that you are a loving person, what does that mean to you? What is a loving person?
- ▶ What does Jesus expect when he tells us to love? Why does he place such emphasis on the need to love?
- ▶ When is loving other people difficult? Have you ever loved someone when loving them was difficult? What does that teach you about the implications of loving as Jesus loves us?
- ▶ What does the phrase, "love recognizes love" mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus wants us to love as he loved us—unto death. He paid the price for mercy—In other words, out of love and mercy for us he gave his life. IN what way are you called to give your life for others and thus live as Jesus showed us how to live?
- ▶ In what way, if any, are you aware of the Spirit who dwells within you? How might you become more aware?
- ▶ If the Spirit of God dwells within your heart, what are the implications for the way you live your life? What behaviors would you like to change?
- ▶ If you knew that Jesus was coming to your house to be with you, what would you want to change in your heart before inviting him into your house?
- ▶ Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.
- ▶ Jesus wants us to love as he loved us—unto death. He paid the price for mercy—In other words, out of love and mercy for us he gave his life. In what way are you called to give your life for others and thus live as Jesus showed us how to live?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

*Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.*

*I trust in you: strengthen my trust.*

*I love you: let me love you more and more.*

*I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.*

*I worship you as my first beginning.*

*I long for you as my last end.*

*I praise you as my constant helper.*

*And I call you as my loving protector.*

*I want to do what you ask of me:*

*In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.*

*Let me love you Lord as my God.*

*And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.*

*A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.*



## APPENDIX

#1. Lady Wisdom breathes upon us and we are transformed more fully into God's image. I am particularly touched by the image of Lady Wisdom and her generative ability to create and re-create. I look at the role of Lady Wisdom over the years and I see a slow, steady transformation in my life. The extent to which I have yielded to her wisdom is the extent to which I have grown.

I like the image of a ship with its rudder. Years ago I responded to the world with a great deal of emotion. Things affected me deeply and I would become easily reactive to situations. I used to be teased that I could cry at Mickey Mouse cartoons and just moments later blow off steam in a fit of bad temper.

The work of Lady Wisdom in my life over the years---the steady slow growth associated with her work---has tempered those emotions. I see more balance in my life. I am steady at the helm in the face of crisis. I have come to understand that I am called to change what I can when it comes to life's circumstances, accept what I cannot change and pray for Lady Wisdom to let me know the difference.

#2. What does it mean that Jesus paid the price for mercy? It means everything. It is the reason for our existence. Jesus paid the price for our lives. It is easy to lose the amazing implications of that statement because we hear it so much, but the implications have eternal implications.

There is a line in a song by Mandisa that says, "Love paid the price for mercy." Because Jesus chose to stand in for me, I am able to stand before him and be pronounced "not guilty." There would be no other way to enjoy the Beatific Vision. One thing the period of purification and enlightenment (Lent) does for the believer is cast away allusions and delusions when it comes to the sin in our lives. I cannot change my life on my own. Sin continues to impact my life. I continue to let my ego dominate my decisions even though I promise in earnest that I will stop. As Paul says, "I continue to do the evil I hate..." Why is that? We are born into a sinful human condition. I pray for strength to avoid sin, sometimes I succeed, but all too often I fail. It is in the midst of that failure that I am comforted to know that I have been vindicated and pronounced "not guilty." When I meditate on that amazing truth I find myself in intimate union with God and I stand in awe. God takes my breath away.

If I truly believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then it must impact the way I live, the way I treat others and my entire world view. I must let go of my ego—I must not sweat the small stuff. When people speak ill of me, I must not harbor resentment. I must love as Jesus loved. I must love my enemies as much as Jesus loves them.

A long time ago a person I knew had serious issues with me; her dislike of me was palpable. She judged me before she even knew me. In the early days of the relationship I tried everything I could think of to make her like me and finally realized that it was not

my job to make her like me. It was my job to try and see her as God sees her. I started to pray for her and I tried not to take offense. Once I entrusted her to God, things started to change. In truth, I started to change. As a result we became friends and the animosity between us melted away. Love had its way—God’s love.

Because of God’s love I can promise to love him with the core of my being. I want to promise to live a righteous life, but alas I know myself. I am a sinner. Yet the Good News is that “Love continues to pay the price for mercy.” Jesus pronounces us vindicated from the cross.

#3. We sometimes look at the Gospel and marvel at what those first disciples experienced. Yet through eyes of faith we too have access to what they experienced. We too are strengthened by God’s power to go out and proclaim God’s love to the world. We too are called to embrace the Paschal Mystery in our lives, take up our cross and offer our lives for God’s ongoing plan of redemption in the world.

Long ago I came to the realization that my ministry—my apostolic work to which I am called—will be as effective as my willingness to embrace the cross and resurrection of Christ in my life.

No matter what happens in my life I hope for the strength to offer my life and the situation up for the work of redemption I am privileged to share with Christ.

When we offer the pain in our lives for others we are given a tiny glimpse of Jesus’ own sacrifice for us.

In dealing with my very sick child I offer the struggle our family endures up for other families who do not have the support system I have, who wander aimlessly wondering where God is in the midst of the insanity they endure day after day.

I wish we never had had to endure this suffering in our family. But we do. I can find meaning in the midst of it and am very aware that it is Christ—the power of His Spirit and the consoling love of the Father that keeps us from losing our way in the midst of a very difficult situation.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Salvation  
Holy Spirit  
Evangelization  
Baptism  
The Church and Ecclesiology

Church Structure  
Sacraments  
Revelation I or II  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## **SALVATION**

Jesus prepares his disciples for his absence and for the saving mission they will take up after his death. He reminds them that he will send his Spirit to be with them and that they must follow his example of love. Today's Gospel gives us a glimpse of the salvation God planned for the world since the beginning of time that comes to fulfillment in the Christ event. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal teaching regarding SALVATION.

## **EVANGELIZATION**

Jesus reminds his disciples that the Spirit will go with them to accomplish the saving mission they will continue after his death. He reminds them that he will send his Spirit to be with them and that they must follow his example of love. We are called to go forth and share that love and what Jesus has given us with those still asleep to his life within. Thus, the focus of today's doctrinal session will be what the Church teaches us about EVANGELIZATION.

## **HOLY SPIRIT**

Jesus reminds his disciples that he will send the Paraclete in his absence. His Spirit will guide and strengthen the disciples and the Christian community after Jesus' death. Thus, today, the doctrinal focus will be the Holy Spirit.

## **BAPTISM**

Jesus reminds his disciples that they will go forth to continue his saving mission in the world. He reminds them that he will send his Spirit to be with them and that they must follow his example of love. They are therefore to go out and baptize all nations in Christ's name through the power of the Triune God. Baptism gives us access to Christ's

ongoing life in the world---presence in absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the sacrament of baptism.

### **CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY**

Jesus invites his disciples into union with his Father and with one another. He promises to be with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. He reminds them that he will send his Spirit to be with them and that they must follow his example of love. The Church is commissioned to go forth. Today we will focus on the Church and what we mean by Ecclesiology.

### **CHURCH STRUCTURE**

Jesus invites his disciples into union with his Father and with one another. He promises to be with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is commissioned to go forth. He reminds them that he will send his Spirit to be with them and that they must follow his example of love. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the structure of the Church.

### **SACRAMENTS**

Jesus is present to us in the sacraments. Jesus promises to send his Spirit to go forth with his community of believers as they establish the reign of God in the world. We are strengthened to go forth through our participation in the sacraments. Christ's presence and union continues through the generations in the sacraments. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

### **REVELATION Part I or II**

What better time is there than a feast devoted to the Triune God to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? Today's session will focus on God's revelation.

### **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.